R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 592 24

STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION DURING DEPTH INTERVIEWS.

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REPORT NUMBER BR-5-0249-3 PUB DATE 60
CONTRACT OEC-6-10-108
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.52 13P.

DESCRIPTORS- *STUDENT TEACHERS, TEACHER PERSISTENCE, PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, *INTERVIEWS, *PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION, SELF CONCEPT, *FEEDBACK, PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PROCESSES, TEACHER ATTITUDES, *FILMS, AUSTIN

THE USE OF THE EXIT INTERVIEW AS A CRITERION MEASURE OF THE STUDY OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS AND TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS WAS REPORTED. THE STUDY WAS MADE AS PART OF A LARGER INVESTIGATION MADE TO DISCOVER THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF TEACHERS WHO REMAIN IN TEACHING AND TO DETERMINE THE PROGRAMS THAT PRODUCE TEACHERS. THE EXIT INTERVIEW WAS A CONFIDENTIAL, HOUR-LONG SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS CONDUCTED BY PSYCHOLOGISTS AT THE END OF THE TEACHER-PREPARATION PROGRAM. THE CASE NOTES OF PSYCHOLOGISTS' INTERVIEWS WITH 33 ELEMENTARY AND 24 SECONDARY PRESERVICE TEACHERS WERE CATEGORIZED. THEY WERE THEN RATED TO DETERMINE PERCEPTIONS OF ONE CONTROL GROUP AND THREE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS THAT RECEIVED INCREASING AMOUNTS OF FEEDBACK FROM TEST RESULTS AND FROM FILMS MADE OF THE STUDENT TEACHERS WHILE TEACHING. INCREASING PSYCHOLOGICAL FEEDBACK FROM TESTS AND FILM VIEWING WAS FOUND TO INCREASE PREFERENCE FOR MIDDLE-CLASS SCHOOLS AND TO DECREASE PREFERENCE FOR LOWER-CLASS SCHOOLS. THE FINDING OF AN INVERSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEAL SCHOOL SITUATION WITH AMOUNT OF EXPERIMENTAL FEEDBACK WAS INTERPRETED AS BEING CONSISTENT WITH FESTINGER'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE. RELATED REPORTS ARE AA 000 026 THROUGH AA 000 031. (AL)

AA000026

BR-5-0249-3
OEC-6-10-108
P.A.24

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Preparation During Depth Interviews[1]

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The preparation of elementary and seconday school teachers is time consuming, arduous, and expensive. At the same time, the high attrition rate common in teacher preparation programs, especially at the secondary level, is wasteful of professional time and public funds. It seems imperative, therefore, to discover what personal qualities characterize teachers who remain in the profession. It is also important to determine what program, or programs, produce such teachers. With this as one objective, a longitudinal, experimental study was begun in 1963 designed to examine the perceptions of prospective teachers of themselves and of the programs in which they participated.[3] This paper is a report of one of the criteria used in this larger study--the confidential, depth interview conducted by psychologists at the end of the teacher preparation program called the exit interview. This hour-long interview between a counseling psychologist and a

[1]The research reported in this paper was partially supported by the Research and Development Center in Teacher Education, Office of Education Contract # 6-10-108. Director, Robert F. Peck; Associate Director, O. H. Bown.

[2]Acknowledgement is given to Sheila Whitesides and Lois Winn for their generous help in the preparation of this paper.

[3]Research carried out under NIMH # 2M6635 and continued under USOE grant #OE 5-10-032 in the PTE & TB Project. Initiator of the research and director of both projects has been Robert F. Peck; Associate Director, O. H. Bown.

ED011592

student teacher occurred immediately before graduation. The interview was semistructured and a therapeutic atmosphere of openness and respect for the individual was maintained.

The primary purpose of the exit interview was to elicit specific information concerning the student teachers' ideas and opinions about their professional preparation. It was anticipated that this data would be susceptible to quantification. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the exit interview provided additional information about teacher preparation programs which had not been subjected to statistical analysis, but which provided data about important differences in individual teaching styles, about interactions between teaching and learning patterns, and about college students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.

Combining the confidential, depth interview with the category method of quantification enables the researcher to estimate perceived equivalence or lack of equivalence of treatment which is externally estimated to be equal. In short, this technique may be of interest to investigators who assess the impact of treatment.

Many studies in the literature have reported use of the interview as a research tool. However, as far as is known, there are few, if any, published studies of teacher preparation in which exit interviews of student teachers have been quantified.

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Procedure

In the main study, a psychological test battery was administered both at the beginning of the junior year and at the end of the senior year to 57 female students in elementary (N=33) and secondary (N=24) education at The University of Texas. This pre-posttest battery consisted of the Directed Imagination Test, Bown Self-Report Inventory, One-Word Sentence Completion Test, Interpersonal Impression Survey, and the Peck Biographical Information Form. The pretest battery also included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and a group-administered Thematic Appreception Test. On the basis of preinstruments alone, the subjects were placed, while juniors, in either high, medium, or low mental health groups by two psychologists. Mental health was defined as predicted ability to cope.

On the basis of these mental health ratings, subjects were placed in four experimental groups (A, B, C, or D). These four groups were balanced for mental health rating. This procedure was followed separately for secondary and for elementary majors.

In her junior year, each student was filmed with 8 mm sound film while teaching a class. At the same time a tape recording was made of the session filmed and a trained observer noted what did not appear on film.

Following the filming, the students in Control Group A received no feedback. Group B received a test interpretation with a counseling psychologist. Group C received a test interpretation and film viewing. A counseling psychologist was present at both conferences.

The students in Group D received the same treatment as those in Group C. In addition, those in Group D were "matched" with cooperating teachers in the public schools on the basis of available psychological information and observation of both groups.

Each elementary subject was required to spend both semesters of her teaching experience in the same school, a school whose pupils were children from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.

Placement of secondary students in public school classrooms during their junior year was not possible due to the shortage of classrooms and cooperating teachers.

During the student teaching semester, the same filming and feedback procedures were carried out. The postbattery of psychological tests was administered to the subjects in the latter part of their student teaching semester. At the end of this semester, each student was interviewed by a counseling psychologist who had not been involved with her previously. The interviewer followed a prescribed outline concentrating on the student's opinions of how she got into teaching, her future plans, unique personal characteristics, basic changes, evaluation of specific courses in education, and her ideal school situation. Confidentiality of all information was assured subjects.

Analysis of Data

1. The exit interviews were categorized on the basis of a 15-item protocol (Guetzkow, 1950): future teaching plans, how she got into teaching, unique characteristics (Ryans, 1960), personal changes due to college, passive-active relationships, ideal school situation, reactions to the tests, filming, test interpretation,

film viewing, and global reactions to the research project, and reactions to the project courses and nonproject courses.

2. Using chi square, frequencies were compared by program (elementary and secondary), by treatment (A, B, C, and D), and by mental health group (high, medium, and low).

Results and Discussion

1. There were no significant differences in the responses of the three mental health groups.
2. The students in elementary differed significantly from those in secondary education with respect to:
   a. Reactions to educational psychology courses ($p < .001$). More elementary than secondary teachers reacted positively to the required educational psychology. Secondary students reported more often that the course did not help them deal with the problems they encountered in the classroom. This finding supports the belief that the two courses are perceived differently.
   b. Reactions to psychological tests ($p < .05$). More secondary teachers reacted negatively to the psychological test battery than did elementary teachers.
   c. Global reaction to the research treatment ($p < .05$). Eighty-eight per cent of the elementary majors responded positively to the research project as a whole, i.e., the testing, filming, experimental manipulation of three courses in the professional sequence, and varying amounts

of feedback. Secondary majors were almost equally divided between positive and neutral-negative reactions.

d. The basis of their decision to go into teaching ($p < .05$). When asked how they happened to choose teaching as a potential profession, more students in elementary than in secondary education reported that they had "always wanted to teach school...as far back as they could remember." On the other hand, those in secondary education more often gave expediency as a reason, i.e., "It was the only thing to do with my major." or "My parents think a teaching certificate is good insurance." Thirty-seven per cent of the secondary majors reported that they originally had this attitude of expediency, but contact with schools and practical experience contibuted to a longer range commitment.

This finding appears to be consistent with the reports that elementary teachers tend to be more student-oriented, whereas, women teaching in secondary school are more content-oriented (Ryans, 1960; Veldman, 1964). The affective needs of the former may appear earlier than the intellectual needs of the latter.

e. Future commitment to the teaching profession. This difference did not reach the required level of significance ($p < .06$). However, the direction of the difference is consistent with results reported above. More subjects in the elementary program reported a future commitment to teaching as reflected in professional plans than did subjects in the secondary program.

3. The experimental groups differed significantly:

   a. In their choice of an ideal school situation ($p < .01$). Further analysis revealed that the controls (Group A) differed significantly from the experimentals (Groups B, C, and D) at the .001 level. Those in the control group preferred to teach in lower class schools, while the subjects in the experimental groups reported preference for middle or upper class schools. If we order the three experimental groups, it is interesting to note that with increasing amounts of experimental feedback, preferences for students from upper class homes also increases.

These findings are consistent with Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957). In the exit interviews most subjects expressed their initial desire to teach in two schools, i.e., a school made up of upper-middle class children and another one composed of students from the lower socio-economic class. The research design, however, required subjects to remain in the same school during both semesters of their contact with the public schools. Assuming that increased amounts of feedback result in closer, interpersonal relationships between the student teachers and some of the research staff who were also their teachers, greater feedback produced greater dissonance because the students' desire for varied teaching experiences conflicted with their teacher-counselor-researchers' requirement that they remain in one school.

The above finding concerning ideal school situation is interpreted as a resolution of this dissonance. Thus graduated levels of teacher-counselor-researcher contact (from A to D) would be expected to produce greater degrees of dissonance; since greater amounts of teacher individualization appeared to satisfy more personal needs of the student teacher, it is felt that the subjects resolved the difference in favor of congruence with the teacher-counselor-researcher.

b. In their acceptance of the actual filming in the classroom ($p < .01$). Those in Group B (who received only a test interpretation) differed significantly from the students in Groups A, C, and D combined ($p < .05$). Those subjects who received no feedback (Group A), or those who received maximum feedback (Groups C and D) reacted more favorably to filming. All of the subjects who were given only a test interpretation (Group B) reported negative reactions to the filming. This finding may mean that, once begun, feedback needs to be complete since partial feedback is viewed as withholding rather than as giving.

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Student Teachers' Perceptions

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Summary

Fifty-seven female subjects in elementary (N=33) and secondary (N=24) teacher preparation programs were assigned to four experimental groups balanced for mental health rating. Each subject was filmed while teaching during both her junior and senior year. The control group received no feedback. The other three groups received increasing amounts of feedback from test results and filming. Confidential, hour-long, depth interviews were conducted by a psychologist at the end of the subject's student teaching semester.

Analysis of the exit interviews indicates that elementary student teachers had significantly more favorable attitudes toward educational psychology courses, the psychological test battery, the research project as a whole, their decision to go into teaching, and future commitment to the teaching profession. Differences among experimental treatment groups support the conclusion that partial feedback is perceived as withholding some feedback rather than as giving some feedback. The finding of an inverse relationship between ideal school situation with amount of experimental feedback was interpreted as being consistent with Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. There were no significant differences associated with mental health ratings.

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Preparation During Depth Interviews

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Abstract

When confidential, hour-long, semistructured, depth interview case notes of psychologists' interviews with elementary (N=33) and secondary (N=24) prospective teachers were categorized and rated to determine perceptions of one control group (N=12) and three feedback conditions groups, B (N=13), C (N=13), and D (N=19), increasing psychological feedback from tests and own-film viewing was found to increase preference for middle class schools and decrease preferences for lower class schools ($p < .001$) and to differentiate groups on other criteria. Findings are consistent with both Festinger's Dissonance Theory and Ryan's teacher effectiveness research.